

Hakka Chinese

Hakka is a language group of varieties of Chinese, spoken natively by the Hakka people throughout southern China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and throughout the diaspora areas of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and in overseas Chinese communities around the world.

Due to its primary usage in scattered isolated regions where communication is limited to the local area, Hakka has developed numerous varieties or dialects, spoken in different provinces, such as Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Fujian, Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangxi and Guizhou, as well as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Hakka is not mutually intelligible with Yue, Wu, Southern Min, Mandarin or other branches of Chinese, and itself contains a few mutually unintelligible varieties. It is most closely related to Gan and is sometimes classified as a variety of Gan, with a few northern Hakka varieties even being partially mutually intelligible with southern Gan. There is also a possibility that the similarities are just a result of shared areal features.^[7]

Taiwan (where Hakka is the native language of a significant minority of the island's residents) is a center for the study and preservation of the language. Pronunciation differences exist between the Taiwanese Hakka dialects and Mainland China's Hakka dialects; even in Taiwan, two major local varieties of Hakka exist.

The Meixian dialect (Moiyen) of northeast Guangdong in China has been taken as the "standard" dialect by the People's Republic of China. The Guangdong Provincial Education Department created an official romanization of Moiyen in 1960, one of four languages receiving this status in Guangdong.

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Hakka	
客家話 / 客家话	
<i>Hak-kâ-fa</i>	
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Hak-kâ-fa/Hak-kâ-va (<i>Hakka/Kejia</i>) written in Chinese characters	
Native to	Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan
Region	Mainland China: northeastern Guangdong, adjoining regions of Fujian, Jiangxi, southern Hunan and the midwest of Sichuan Hong Kong: New Territories (older generations since younger Hakkas mostly speak Cantonese due to language shift and social assimilation)
Ethnicity	Hakka
Native speakers	47.8 million (2007) ^[1]
Language family	Sino-Tibetan <div> <div>▪ Sinitic</div> <div>▪ Hakka</div> </div>

closely related to Hakka.

Linguistic development

A regular pattern of sound change can generally be detected in Hakka, as in most Chinese varieties, of the derivation of phonemes from earlier forms of Chinese. Some examples:

- Characters such as 武 (war, martial arts) or 屋 (room, house), are pronounced roughly *mwio* and *uk* (*mjuX* and *ʔuwk* in Baxter's transcription) in Early Middle Chinese, have an initial *v* phoneme in Hakka, being *vu* and *vuk* in Hakka respectively. Like in Mandarin, labiodentalisation process also changed *mj-* to a *w*-like sound in Hakka before grave vowels, while Cantonese retained the original distinction (compare Mandarin 武 *wǔ*, 屋 *wū*, Cantonese 武 *mou*⁵, 屋 *uk*¹).
- Middle Chinese initial phonemes /*ɲ*/ (*ny* in Baxter's transcription) of the characters 人 and 日, among others, merged with *ng-* /*ŋ*/ initials in Hakka (人 *ngin*, 日 *ngit*). For comparison, in Mandarin, /*ɲ*/ became *r-* (人 *rén*, 日 *rì*), while in Cantonese, it merged with initial /*j*/ (人 *yan*⁴, 日 *yat*⁶).
- The initial consonant phoneme exhibited by the character 話 (word, speech; Mandarin *huà*) is pronounced *f* or *v* in Hakka (*v* does not properly exist as a distinct unit in many Chinese varieties).
- The initial consonant of 學 *hɔk* usually corresponds with an *h* [h] approximant in Hakka and a voiceless alveo-palatal fricative (x [ç]) in Mandarin.

Romanization	Kah-ka-ho
Gan	
Romanization	Khak-ka-ua
Hakka	
Romanization	hag5 ga1 fa4 or hag5 ga1 va4
Phàk-fa-sù	Hak-kâ-fa or Hak-kâ-va
Yue: Cantonese	
Yale	haak gā wá
Romanization	
Jyutping	haak ³ gaa ¹ waa ²
Southern Min	
Hokkien POJ	Kheh-oē (客話)

Phonology

Dialects

Hakka has as many regional dialects as there are counties with Hakka speakers as the majority. Some of these Hakka dialects are not mutually intelligible with each other. Meixian is surrounded by the counties of Pingyuan, Dabu, Jiaoling, Xingning, Wuhua, and Fengshun. Each county has its own special phonological points of interest. For instance, Xingning lacks the codas [-m] and [-p]. These have merged into [-n] and [-t], respectively. Further away from Meixian, the Hong Kong dialect lacks the [-u-] medial, so, whereas Meixian pronounces the character 光 as [kwɔŋ¹], Hong Kong Hakka dialect pronounces it as [kɔŋ¹], which is similar to the Hakka spoken in neighbouring Shenzhen.

As much as endings and vowels are important, the tones also vary across the dialects of Hakka. The majority of Hakka dialects have six tones. However, there are dialects which have lost all of their checked tone (Ru Sheng), and the characters originally of this tone class are distributed across the non-Ru tones. Such a dialect is Changting which is situated in the Western Fujian province. Moreover, there is evidence of the retention of an earlier Hakka tone system in the dialects of Haifeng and Lufeng situated on coastal south eastern Guangdong province. They contain a yin-yang splitting in the Qu tone, giving rise to seven tones in all (with yin-yang registers in Ping and Ru tones and a Shang tone).

In Taiwan, there are two main dialects: Sixian and Hailu (alternatively known as Haifeng; Hailu refers to Haifeng County and Lufeng County). Most Hakka dialect speakers found on Taiwan originated from these two regions. Sixian speakers come from Jiaying Prefecture (Chinese: 嘉應), mainly from the four counties of Chengxiang (now Meixian District), Zhengping (now Jiaoling), Xingning and Pingyuan. Most dialects of Taiwanese Hakka, except Sixian and Dabu, preserved postalveolar consonants ([tʃ], [tʃʰ], [ʃ] and [ʒ]), which are uncommon in other southern Chinese varieties.

- Huizhou dialect (惠州客家話) (not to be confused with Huizhou Chinese)
- Meixian dialect (梅縣客家話) (otherwise known as Meizhou)
- Wuhua dialect (五華客家話)
- Xingning dialect (興寧客家話)
- Pingyuan dialect (平遠客家話)
- Jiaoling dialect (蕉嶺客家話)
- Dabu dialect (大埔客家話)
- Fengshun dialect (豐順客家話)
- Longyan dialect (龍岩客家話)
- Hailu dialect (海陸客家話)
- Sixian dialect (四縣客家話)
- Raoping dialect (饒平客家話) (a.k.a. Shangrao)^[12]
- Zhaoan dialect (詔安客家話)

Ethnologue reports the dialects as *Yue-Tai* (Meixian, Wuhua, Raoping, Taiwan Kejia: Meizhou above), *Yuezhong* (Central Guangdong), *Huizhou*, *Yuebei* (Northern Guangdong), *Tingzhou* (Min-Ke), *Ning-Long* (Longnan), *Yugui*, *Tonggu*.

Vocabulary

Like other southern Chinese varieties, Hakka retains single syllable words from earlier stages of Chinese; thus a large number of syllables are distinguished by tone and final consonant. This reduces the need for compounding or making words of more than one syllable. However, it is also similar to other Chinese varieties in having words which are made from more than one syllable.

monosyllabic words

Hakka hanzi	Pronunciation	English	Notes
人	[ŋin˥]	person	
碗	[uɔŋ˥]	bowl	
狗	[kɛu˥]	dog	
牛	[ŋiu˥]	cow	
屋	[uuk˥]	house	
嘴	[tsɔi˥]	mouth	
𠄎	[ŋai˥]	me / I	In Hakka, the standard Chinese equivalent 我 is pronounced [ŋɔ˥].
渠 ^[13] or 𠄎 ^[14]	[ki˥]	he / she / it	In Hakka, the standard Chinese equivalents 他 / 她 / 它 / 牠 are pronounced [tʰa˥].

polysyllabic words

Hakka hanzi	Pronunciation	English
日頭	[ŋit˥ tʰɛu˥]	sun
月光	[ŋiɛt˥ kʷɔŋ˥]	moon
屋下	[uuk˥ kʰa˥]	home
屋家		
電話	[tʰiɛn˥ ua˥]	telephone
學堂	[hɔk˥ tʰɔŋ˥]	school
筷子	[kai˥ zi˥]	chopsticks

Hakka, as well as numerous other Chinese varieties such as Min and Cantonese, prefers the verb [kɔŋ˥] 講 when referring to *saying* rather than the Mandarin *shuō* 說 (Hakka [sɔt˥]).

Hakka uses [sit˥] 食, like Cantonese [sɪk˥] for the verb "to eat" and 飲 [jɛm˥] (Hakka [jim˥]) for "to drink", unlike Mandarin which prefers *chī* 吃 (Hakka [kʰiɛt˥]) as "to eat" and *hē* 喝 (Hakka [hɔt˥]) as "to drink" where the meanings in Hakka are different, *to stutter* and *to be thirsty* respectively.

Examples

Hakka hanzi	IPA	English
阿妹，若姆去投墟轉來唔曾？	[a˥ mɔi˥, ɲa˥ mi˥ hi˥ tʰju˥ hi˥ tsɔŋ˥ lɔi˥ m˥ tʰɛn˥]	Has your mother returned from going to the market yet, child?
其老弟捉到隻蜚葉來搞。	[kja˥ lau˥ tʰai˥ tsuk˥ tau˥ tsak˥ jɔŋ˥ jap˥ lɔi˥ kau˥]	His/her younger brother caught a butterfly to play with.
好冷阿，水桶个水敢凝冰阿。	[hau˥ lan˥ ɔ˥, sui˥ tʰuŋ˥ kai˥ sui˥ kam˥ kʰɛn˥ pɛn˥ ɔ˥]	It's very cold, the water in the bucket has frozen over.

Writing systems

Various dialects of Hakka have been written in a number of Latin orthographies, largely for religious purposes, since at least the mid-19th century.

Previously, the single largest work in Hakka was the *New Testament and Psalms* (1993, 1138 pp., see *The Bible in Chinese: Hakka* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20040822130503/http://worldscriptures.org/pages/chinesehakka.html>)), but since 2012 that has been surpassed by the publication of the complete Hakka Bible known as the *Today's Taiwan Hakka Version* and includes the *Old Testament* along with audio recordings. These works render Hakka in both romanization (*phâk-fa-sṳ̂*) and Han characters (including ones unique to Hakka) and are based on the dialects of Taiwanese Hakka speakers. The work of Biblical translation is being performed by missionaries of the *Presbyterian Church in Canada*.

The popular *The Little Prince* has also been translated into Hakka (2000), specifically the *Miaoli* dialect of Taiwan (itself a variant of the *Sixian* dialect). This also was dual-script, albeit using the *Tongyong Pinyin* scheme.

Media

Hakka TV is a state-run, primarily Hakka-language television channel in Taiwan that started in 2003. In mainland China, Meizhou Televisions's Hakka Public Channel (梅州电视台客家公共频道) has broadcasts 24 hours a day in Hakka since 2006.^[15]

See also

- *Varieties of Chinese*
- *Hakka culture*
- *Hakka Transliteration Scheme*
- *Phâk-fa-sṳ̂*
- *Hagfa Pinyin*
- *Protection of the Varieties of Chinese*

Notes

- a. National language in *Taiwan*;^[3] also statutory status in Taiwan as one of the languages for *public transport announcements* and for the *naturalisation* test^[4]

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Further reading

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